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ABSTRACT

This handbook was developed for teachers who have a visually handicapped child in their regular classroom. Classroom activities designed to prepare students to receive a visually handicapped classmate are described. Recommendations are made on the use of special resources available to the teacher, and descriptions are given of successful cooperative efforts between regular classroom teachers and specialists in the education of the blind. Methods for introducing the blind child to a new physical environment are discussed and modifications which may be made in classroom arrangement described. Methods for modifying standard instructional materials to accommodate the learning style of the visually handicapped student are also discussed. A listing is provided of basic and supplementary instructional materials. A bibliography of books for children, parents, and teachers is included as well as addresses of associations which provide supplemental resources for educating the visually impaired. (JD)

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The Visually Handicapped Child in the Regular Class

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By Barbara Aiello
Creator
The Kids on the Block

AFT Teachers' Network for Education of the Handicapped

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
Educational Issues Department

The AFT Teachers' Network for Education of the Handicapped is intended to facilitate regular education teachers' ability to work effectively with handicapped children in their classrooms. The Network is involved in inservice training and preparation and dissemination of resources to teachers to help accomplish this goal.

In conjunction with its dissemination efforts, the Network is publishing a series of pamphlets on various disabilities for teachers who work with handicapped children. These pamphlets provide practical information for use in the regular classroom in relation to the following disabilities: dyslexia, mental retardation, learning disabilities and emotional handicaps; hearing, visual, and orthopedic impairments; and special health problems, such as asthma and diabetes.

Carolyn Trice
Project Director

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"Most people who have a visual handicap are not frightened by it...they have had extensive mobility training and education in reading braille..."

Introduction

"What I like best about my new school," says Ronnie J., "is that it's near my house so I get to go to school with my friends."

For Ronnie, who is disabled, going to school with his non-disabled peers is one example of educating special children in the "least restrictive environment" of the regular class or, in the vernacular of the day, evidence of "mainstreaming" in action. For Ronnie's parents, who must balance their child's special needs with their realization that Ronnie must learn to live in a non-disabled world; and for his teachers, who have begun to view Ronnie's disability as a manageable difference rather than a classroom problem, mainstreaming has become more than a series of directives from the central office for a legislative mandate drafted by their state's lawmakers. The process for parents, teachers and students, both disabled and non-disabled, has become a consistent daily experience in living, working, and learning.

"Sometimes mainstreaming works well, sometimes it doesn't," says one teacher who has taught many children with all sorts of handicaps in her regular classes for over five years. "I think it's because the law, as important as it is, cannot mandate attitude change; and putting an ideal like mainstreaming into daily practice, is the real issue."

If this is true, it is important that educators, both special and regular, examine and reflect upon some basic ideas for making the mainstreaming process happen at the classroom, math group playground, art class, study hall and reading corner level. And teachers need some introductory "how-to's" to initiate the process in the classroom and in the school.

This pamphlet is designed to help regular classroom teachers understand the practical issues regarding the mainstreaming process, as well as employ specific strategies that can make mainstreaming a successful experience in the regular class.

What Is It Like to Be Visually Handicapped?

Many people have trouble seeing correctly. Most of them can have their vision corrected by wearing prescription glasses. Sometimes, however, a person cannot see well at all and wearing glasses just won't help. These people are visually impaired and are either legally or totally blind.

When someone, perhaps even you or a friend of yours, has to wear glasses, that person's vision is corrected to 20/20. 20/20 means that your eyesight is average, that is, you can see an object from a distance of twenty feet, the way an average eye is supposed to see it. If someone has 20/200 vision, that person can see something at only 20 feet away the way an average eye can see it from 200 feet away. So you can see how a person could be legally blind, while still having some usable eyesight.

A person with a visual handicap may use large print books, or "talking books" (audio cassettes). Your school library may have some large print books that you can examine, or your public library may have some. These books are printed so that a person with a little usable vision will be able to read.

Some students are almost totally blind and became so when they received too much oxygen at birth. Some children are blind or have visual impairments because their mothers contracted German measles while they were pregnant. Today there are vaccinations against German measles and doctors are more careful about the amount of oxygen given to premature babies, but some children are still born with visual handicaps or become blind as a result of an accident or illness.

Retinitis Pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease where a child's vision is progressively lost over a long period of time, is another leading cause of blindness. Still, many people with visual handicaps and many who are blind can see some shadows and colors but cannot see well enough to read, drive, or get around without assistance.

Most people who have a visual handicap are not frightened by it. Usually they have had extensive mobility training and education in reading braille, and many sighted people are amazed at all of the things that people with visual handicaps can do. Many people with a visual handicap work. They hold interesting jobs—from telephone operator to state Supreme Court justice—and can swim, ski, play pool, ride tandem bicycles, cook, marry, and have families.

"You've got super ears," Rhonda said to Stephen, her fourth grade classmate who is blind. Stephen explained that people with a visual handicap hear no better or worse than sighted people, "It's just that I use my ears more, 'cause I need them more than you do!"

Preparing Your Students for a Handicapped Classmate

"Most people think that people with visual handicaps have better hearing than the rest of us..."

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

I. "The Helping Relationship"

Objective:

To help children become aware of what it is like to need help and how to give help to a person with a visual handicap.

Materials:

- Masks (enough for half of the group). The "half mask" sold at Halloween is ideal for this purpose.
- Mystic tape (black) to cover the eye holes of the masks.

Procedure:

Divide the children into pairs and explain that each child will have the opportunity to be both the visually handicapped person and the helper. Give one mask to each pair.

Write the following directions on the board:

1. One person from each pair will be visually handicapped and wear the mask. The other person is the helper.
2. If you are the helper, take your partner around the room. Go in and out and all around chairs, desks, and tables.
3. Take the visually handicapped person into the hall and get a drink of water from the fountain.
4. Return to your seats and switch roles.
5. Try to remember to ask your partner which is the best way for you to help.

(NOTE: Be sure to explain that the sighted partner must stay with the visually handicapped partner at all times.)

Discussion:

In small groups, composed of the original pairs, discuss the following:

1. How did you feel having a visual handicap?
2. Did you find that you were more aware of how things felt and/or did you listen more carefully?
3. How did you feel as the helper?
4. As the helper, what were some of the things you did that were very helpful?
5. Does your partner agree?
6. If you were the visually handicapped person first, did that experience effect how you helped later on?
7. What was the most comfortable way for you and your visually handicapped partner to work together?
8. Was it harder for you to be the person with the visual handicap or the helper? Explain your choice.

Explain to the children that they have just experienced what it is like to have a visual handicap and how blind children learn to get around. This is called "mobility training", and special teachers work with visually impaired children teaching them to move around in comfortable and confident ways. Often children with visual problems work with sighted persons, and sighted people must learn how to help a visually handicapped person, too.

Some people think that people with visual handicaps have better hearing than all the rest of us. You can tell now that that is not true. Just as the children used their ears more when they were blindfolded, people who are blind or have other visual impairments depend on their ears to give them information about the world.

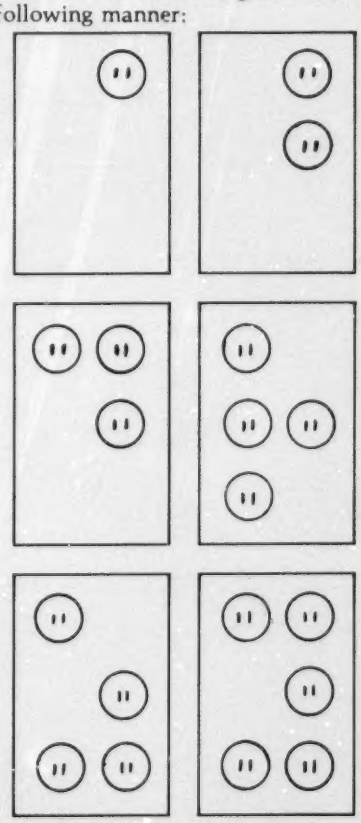
II. "Can You Tell by Touching"

Objective:

To give children an understanding of the tactile sense and to show them how a visually handicapped person develops an acute sense of touch.

Materials

- Small paper bags
- A random collection of different objects, (i.e., a block, a pencil, an apple, paper, a cup, a small book).
- Groups of six cards constructed to represent the "braille cell". Use buttons glued onto the cards in the following manner:



"When you know a child with a visual handicap will join your class, request information regarding that child's current special setting."

Procedure:

1. Divide children into groups of three to four children each.
2. Using masks, or keeping their eyes closed, have them take turns feeling the objects from the first group (apple, cup, etc.).
3. Permit each child to identify one object by touching it, inside the bag.
4. Discuss with the children how each was able to identify the object (i.e. the shape, the texture, special features about it...point on the pencil, etc.).
5. Fill the bags with the braille "button cards". Pass the bag around and have each child describe a selected card, while keeping the card in the bag.
6. Allow the children to continue feeling the cards until they think they have identified the entire group of braille letters in the bag. (i.e., "one card has a button in the upper right corner", etc.)

Discussion:

Remove the cards from the bag and, with the children, identify the braille letters represented by the buttons on the card.

Explain to the children that they have just experienced the way visually handicapped people develop their sense of touch in order to read braille and to learn things from the world around them. Discuss the following with the group:

1. Why was it easier to identify the items in the first bag?
2. What made identification in the second bag so difficult?
3. What clues did you use to tell one braille card from another?
4. Some blind children and children with visual impairments say that braille is like a "secret code". Why do you think they say that?

III. "Braille is Like a Secret Code"

Objective:

To allow children to experience the writing and reading of braille sentences.

Materials:

- A copy of the braille alphabet, displayed on a large chart or copied on the chalk board.
- One square of heavy cardboard for each child (Approx. 6" x 4")

One medium size nail for each child

- Motor tasks printed on small pieces of paper, (i.e., "Clap three times", "Pat your head", "Stand on one foot", etc.)

Procedure:

1. Show the children the braille alphabet once again.
2. Discuss how the braille alphabet is formed, (i.e., combining the six dots which form the braille cell.)
3. Have the children find the letters of their first names and/or have them punch out their initials in braille, using their cardboard and nails.
4. When the children feel comfortable with this new way of writing, divide them into groups of four children each.
5. Provide each group with two printed tasks. Ask them to work together to punch out the task in braille.
6. When all the groups have completed the braille message, have them exchange braille task cards with another group.
7. When each group has deciphered their tasks, have them demonstrate their messages to each other.

Discussion:

Following the braille writing and reading activity, discuss these questions with the group:

1. Ask the children how they felt writing and reading the messages in braille. What was easy about it? What was difficult? What would make it easier to write in braille? Can they think of any special materials (either in use now or that could be invented) that would make the job easier?

(NOTE: Many people with visual handicaps often carry a pocket stylus and template. The template is a metal stencil that helps them to make the braille impressions. The stylus is a snub-nosed pen. Special heavy paper is included in the pocket so that the braille impressions will come out raised and firm. You can borrow a stylus and template from a local organization for the blind so your students can see it and work with it.)

2. More blind people and people with visual handicaps use Talking Books rather than braille books. Why do you think they prefer Talking Books?
3. Jay, who is blind, told his friend Roger, "Braille takes a long time to learn and you have to have a good memory". Do you agree with him? Did this experiment influence your opinion?
4. Western Union is a company that delivers messages called telegrams to people. Someone who wants to send a very important message might send a telegram because it gets there much faster than the mail—sometimes on the same day. Western Union has just begun to deliver braille telegrams for blind and visually handicapped people. Why would a person want to send a telegram in braille? One blind person said that he was very pleased to hear about the braille telegrams because now he could read his message privately. What did he mean by that? How would you feel if someone had to read all of your mail to you, as must be done now for many people with visual handicaps.

In Your Classroom— A Place to Begin

"...request your administrator to suggest all school personnel learn ...about working with children who have visual handicaps."

GETTING READY

When you know that a child with a visual handicap will join your class, request information regarding that child's current special setting. If the child attends a special school or special class, arrange for your regular class children to become pen pals with the child and some of his disabled classmates. If mainstreaming is done properly, time should be allowed prior to the mainstreaming placement to have the two classes exchange letters, pictures, and other items of interest. One teacher whose students corresponded with children in a school for the blind shared "audio letters" with them. The children made audio cassettes about class trips, plays and stories, and regularly shared them with their visually handicapped pen pals. In this way, the regular class students learned about their new classmate and some of the things that visually handicapped children did prior to that child's participation in the regular class.

Following a relationship based on letters, one fourth grade teacher from a local school for the blind arranged an "exchange student" program. After the fourth graders learned some basics about braille, three students from each class visited each other's school on a regular basis. "It was a real thrill for the children to meet each other after their three months of letter writing," reports the fourth grade teacher. "We continued to conduct our school day on a regular basis and the children fit right in. The entire experience was so positive that some of my students maintained contact with their visually handicapped friends right through summer vacation."

Teachers can arrange an exchange program for special events, such as, plays and assemblies or for special study units. A sixth grade history teacher and a teacher in a special program for visually impaired children coordinated a history unit and exchanged students throughout the lessons. They planned two joint field trips, worked on mobility training procedures together, and continued to offer each other consistent help and support when two of the children were integrated into the regular sixth grade history program.

Since it is both the right and the responsibility of the regular class teacher to participate in the planning process for the mainstreaming of any handicapped child into the regular class, you should be given ample time to prepare for the arrival of your new student. When you have received the student's name, take time to contact the child's special education teacher. If possible, arrange to observe the child in the special setting. Chat with the child and discuss the preparations necessary for placement in the regular class. Often, the children themselves are not contacted with regard to the mainstreaming setting when, in fact, visually handicapped children may be able to offer many helpful suggestions regarding the special ways in which they do school work.

Share textbooks and other teaching materials with the special education teacher and ask that you be given help with regard to the adaptation of these for blind or other visually impaired students. If books need to be brailled or put on audio cassettes, regular class teachers will need to know these things and be ready with the appropriate materials when the child arrives. Often it is the special education teacher who makes these initial overtures to the regular class teacher in preparation for the mainstream setting. Sometimes however, due to time restrictions, these preparations are not made by the special education department and regular class teachers must be aware that they are entitled to help and should initiate this important first step.

THE FIRST WEEK— OFF TO A GOOD START

Using the services of your special education department, library, or local American Foundation for the Blind chapter, have the first names of all of the children in the class brailled on large cards. Attach these cards to the front of each desk and have the children learn to recognize their names in braille. Upon arrival, introduce the visually handicapped child to the class and use the braille name tags as references and reminders, as well as for an interesting welcome for the child.

In addition to the children in your class, request your administrator to suggest to all school personnel (bus drivers, custodians, cooks, office workers, playground supervisors, other administrators, volunteers, nurses, other teachers,

"Visually handicapped children should sit far away from ancillary noises since they depend so much on auditory cues."

etc.,) that they learn the following helpful suggestions about working with children who have visual handicaps:

1. Identify yourself by name when you encounter a visually handicapped student. Tell the student you are leaving when your conversation ends.

2. If you wonder whether a visually impaired child needs help, just ask, "Can I help you?" If the child says yes, ask "How can I help?" and follow the instructions the child offers.

3. Use the "sighted guide" technique for helping the visually handicapped student walk through unfamiliar territory. This means that the student will grasp your arm just above the elbow, with four fingers on the inside of your arm and thumb on the outside. Walk a half step ahead with the student's left shoulder behind your right shoulder. As you pass through doorways or other narrow areas, drop your guiding arm down behind you to let the student know that it is time to step behind you. As you practice this technique ask your resource teacher, a visually handicapped adult, or the student to work to help you, the staff and the students become comfortable with it.

4. If an object is closer or farther away than it should be, or if the object is in danger of being knocked over, guide the visually handicapped student's hand toward it and describe where it has been placed.

5. Use "clock directions" to explain where objects are on a flat surface. For example, sighted students can tell their visually handicapped classmate that "Today for lunch we're having hamburgers, beans and applesauce. Your hamburger is at 12:00 on the plate, your beans are at 3:00 and your applesauce is at 9:00." Use clock directions to help the child find books, art materials, and other supplies in your class.

6. There will be times when you will need to give your visually handicapped student verbal directions to get from place to place in class or in the school. Give non-visual directions oriented from the direction the student is facing. Compass directions, left-right cues, and familiar landmarks are particularly helpful.

7. Remind students and staff not to leave doors ajar when visually impaired students are walking around the school.

8. If the art room, hallway or cafeteria has been rearranged, advise teachers and staff to discuss these changes verbally with the student who has a visual handicap.

9. Ask the special education paraprofessional or someone who knows braille to create labels in braille for you to be used on supply cans, lockers, helper charts, and the like.

CLASSROOM MODIFICATIONS

With a partner or friend, have the visually impaired student take time to examine the classroom, its furniture, materials and equipment. This may be done before school several days prior to the mainstreaming experience. Show the child his desk, discuss special materials, favorite subjects, and any adaptation that may make life more comfortable when actual mainstreaming takes place.

The following landmarks in the classroom setting should be pointed out to the visually handicapped child when visiting your classroom prior to the mainstreamed placement:

1. your desk
2. the student's desk
3. bookshelves and/or permanent cabinets
4. storage places for paper and writing equipment
5. wastebasket
6. bulletin boards and chalkboards
7. windows
8. interest centers
9. doorways/bathrooms
10. pencil sharpener and other miscellaneous equipment

Take the child from the classroom entrance to each landmark and back again. Ask him to "trail" the perimeter of the room from the entrance and back. ("Trailing" is a mobility technique where the visually handicapped child uses the back of one hand and the knuckles of his fingers to lightly contact surfaces.) Encourage your student to independently explore the classroom until both of you are confident that the student has a mental picture of the room.

Teachers should feel free to rearrange the classroom furniture whenever appropriate for class activities. Advise your visually handicapped student that the furniture has been moved and, together, re-orient him to the changes. Give your student a desk which allows for easy accessibility to the door, his books, and any special equipment. If the child has some usable vision (as many visually handicapped students do), allow him to sit in the most appropriate place to view the teacher and the board. Visually handicapped students should sit far away from ancillary noises (i.e., clanging radiators, etc.) since they depend so much upon auditory clues. A bulletin board that is within arm's reach is especially useful for posting large print notices concerning homework, independent activities, and general information for the class.

ADAPTING MATERIALS

As you begin to modify standard materials and methods to accommodate the learning style of your visually handicapped students, ask for and expect practical suggestions from the resource teacher or itinerant teacher within your special education department. Your visually handicapped student is a learner and has already learned to use a variety of materials in reading, math, history, and other subjects. Many of these can be adapted for use in the regular classroom. Ask about these materials and request that some of them be included in your classroom store of teaching devices before the student enters your regular class.

THE BASICS

- Most visually handicapped children rely upon "talking books" to learn material from classroom texts. "Talking books" are audio cassettes which conform to the material written in textbooks. The visually handicapped student also uses them to learn basic subject matter. If your student relies upon "talking books", have a paraprofessional make tapes of the initial material needed for your class. Students themselves can make tapes of literary works and the production of a "talking book" can become a worthwhile class project in itself. In addition, "talking books" are available from many libraries; the Library of Congress' Divison for the Blind and Physically Handicapped; and from "talking book clubs" (like Literary Guild and Book of the Month Club) to which your visually handicapped student may belong.
- Many visually handicapped children read or are learning to read braille, and there are many books available in braille for your student. Check with special teachers regarding the use of braille materials for your student and insist that material be prepared for the student prior to the regular classroom placement. Volunteer groups often braille material free of charge and braille books are available from public libraries and the Library of Congress.
- For children with some usable vision, large print books are available. There are many classroom texts printed in large type and many magazines and literary works are available in large print books. Check with the special education department of your school, public libraries, and volunteer organizations for the availability of these materials.
- "Twin vision books" are useful when visually impaired and sighted children need to read together. These are books where the text is printed on the page and a braille overlay added so that the visually handicapped child can read the same words that the sighted child reads. "Twin vision books" allow disabled and non-disabled children to work together and for sighted children to understand more fully the skills that visually handicapped children possess when reading. Many volunteer organizations will add braille to classroom library books or supplemental reading books used in class. "Twin vision books" are especially appropriate for young readers.
- Many children with visual handicaps use an abacus when calculating. Be sure that a large abacus accompanies the child to the regular class and that other children, in addition to the visually handicapped student, know how to use it. When sighted children work with the disabled classmate in this fashion, they broaden mathematics skills as well as learn how to work together.
- Along with the proliferation of calculators and mini-computers of all kinds, some visually handicapped children are using "talking calculators." These machines function in the same way as the standard calculator but, in addition to the visual display, a computerized electronic voice gives the entries and the answer. Some visually handicapped children have their own calculators, others use those from the special education department, while others use calculators that have been donated by business and industry
- Many visually handicapped children are learning to type and some are quite proficient at the skill. When working and learning in the sighted world, most visually handicapped people affirm the necessity of typing skills and many children are taught the skill in their special education classes. If the child uses a typewriter in the special class setting, be sure that one is available for you in the regular class. If the school system is reluctant to provide the student with the machine, contact local organizations which represent blind and visually handicapped people to see if one can be obtained for your student. However, if the use of a typewriter is essential and is listed on the child's IEP, the school system is legally required to provide one.
- Films, filmstrips, and videotapes are appropriate for many visually impaired students. Visually handicapped people watch television, often with a friend who provides commentary on the action when there is no auditory description of what is happening on the screen. Following this format in class when showing a movie or filmstrip allows visually handicapped students to work with a sighted child and to learn from this medium as well.
- It is important that in addition to the auditory modality, visually handicapped students learn using their sense of touch, or tactile modality. Large plastic models of relief maps, the human body and DNA molecules are valuable resources which can be gathered prior to each new unit of instruction.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

(NOTE: All of the following items are available from the American Foundation for the Blind, Consumer Products Department, 15 West 16th St., New York, NY 10011, or can be obtained from special education classes and resource rooms.)

- *Audible Balls*—basketballs, soccer balls, and small baseballs are constructed with sound devices imbedded inside. When the ball comes toward a visually handicapped player, it emits a loud beeping noise so the child knows that when it is loud, it is time to kick or hit the ball.
- *Games*—instructional games such as SCRABBLE, MONOPOLY, CHECKERS, MASTERMIND, and IMMA WHIZ (braille mathematical bingo games for addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) have been modified so that sighted and blind children can play together.
- *Measuring Spoons*—calibrated in braille for home arts.
- *Braille protractors, rulers, traingles, scales* for math and science, and a variety of odd carpentry tools for industrial arts.

"...if the use of a typewriter is essential and is listed on the child's IEP, the school system is legally required to provide one."

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Stratton, Josephine. *The Blind Child in the Regular Kindergarten*, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois: 1977.

———, *When You Have a Visually Handicapped Child in Your Classroom: Suggestions for Teachers*, available free from the American Foundation for the Blind, 15 W. 16th Street, New York, N.Y., 10011.

———, *Mainstreaming and the Family*, Exceptional Parent Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

———, *Travel and Travel Training for People with Disabilities*, Exceptional Parent Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

The following pamphlets are available for free or at minimal cost (Up to 50 copies) from

American Foundation for the Blind
15 West 16th Street
New York, N.Y. 10011

FIP 055—Environmental Modifications for the Visually Impaired: A Handbook.
FIS 025—Braille Alphabet and Numerals
FIS 033—Helen Keller
FML 029—Dog Guides for the Blind
FIL 031—Facts about Blindness
FML 034—How Does a Blind Person Get Around?
FIS 040—Louis Braille
FIS 058—Understanding Braille
FiL 061—What Do You Do When You See a Blind Person?

"Bonnie, The Story of Training Seeing Eye Dog" (comic book book format) the Seeing Eye, Inc., Morristown, N.J. 07960

"My Weekly Reader" (in braille) sample copy from: American Printing House for the Blind, 1839 Frankfort Avenue, Louisville, KY 40206

RESOURCES

The following organizations will provide free materials on blindness and visual handicaps. These materials can be used in classroom learning centers or distributed to children and parents.

American Foundation for the Blind
15 West 16th Street
New York, NY 10011

American Printing House for the Blind
1839 Frankfort Avenue
Louisville, KY 40206

Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind
2021 14th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Perkins School for the Blind
175 North Beacon Street
Watertown, MA 02172

American Blind Bowlers Association
150 North Bellaire Avenue
Louisville, KY 40206

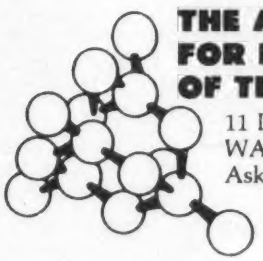
National Blindness Information Center
(National Federation for the Blind)
1346 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Scouting for the Visually Handicapped
#3063-Supply Division
Boy Scouts of America
North Brunswick, NJ 08902

THE KIDS ON THE BLOCK

The Kids on the Block are a troupe of disabled and non-disabled puppets designed to teach children in regular classes what it's like to be handicapped. The classroom teaching kit contains six child size puppets (Mandy is deaf, Renaldo is blind, Mark has cerebral palsy, Ellen Jane is retarded, and Brenda and Melody are non-disabled), scripts on tape cassettes, an extensive teacher's guide of classroom activities and other teaching materials. Developed by Barbara Aiello. For information write:
The Kids on the Block
3509 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

For additional copies, write to:



THE AFT TEACHERS' NETWORK FOR EDUCATION OF THE HANDICAPPED

11 DUPONT CIRCLE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
Ask for item #448

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